

Finding opportunity during challenging times



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In challenging times, we are often given opportunities. With most people working from home during the health pandemic, vast areas of commercial space are unoccupied or have reduced hours. These circumstances present possible energy efficiency opportunities that property managers, building operators and business owners can apply (social distancing measures observed, of course) during this quieter period to reduce ongoing operational costs.

Empty office spaces present efficiency opportunities

1. Keep property manager/tenant communication lines open – During any crisis, the importance of frequent two-way communication between property managers and tenants is vital. It is even more so during these unprecedented times. Let each other know what your businesses are doing. If an office has reduced hours or is empty, this brings significant energy savings opportunities. If you are a tenant that pays your bills directly, you could see the direct benefit of reductions. If you are a property manager, these savings could be found through many of your tenants and buildings.

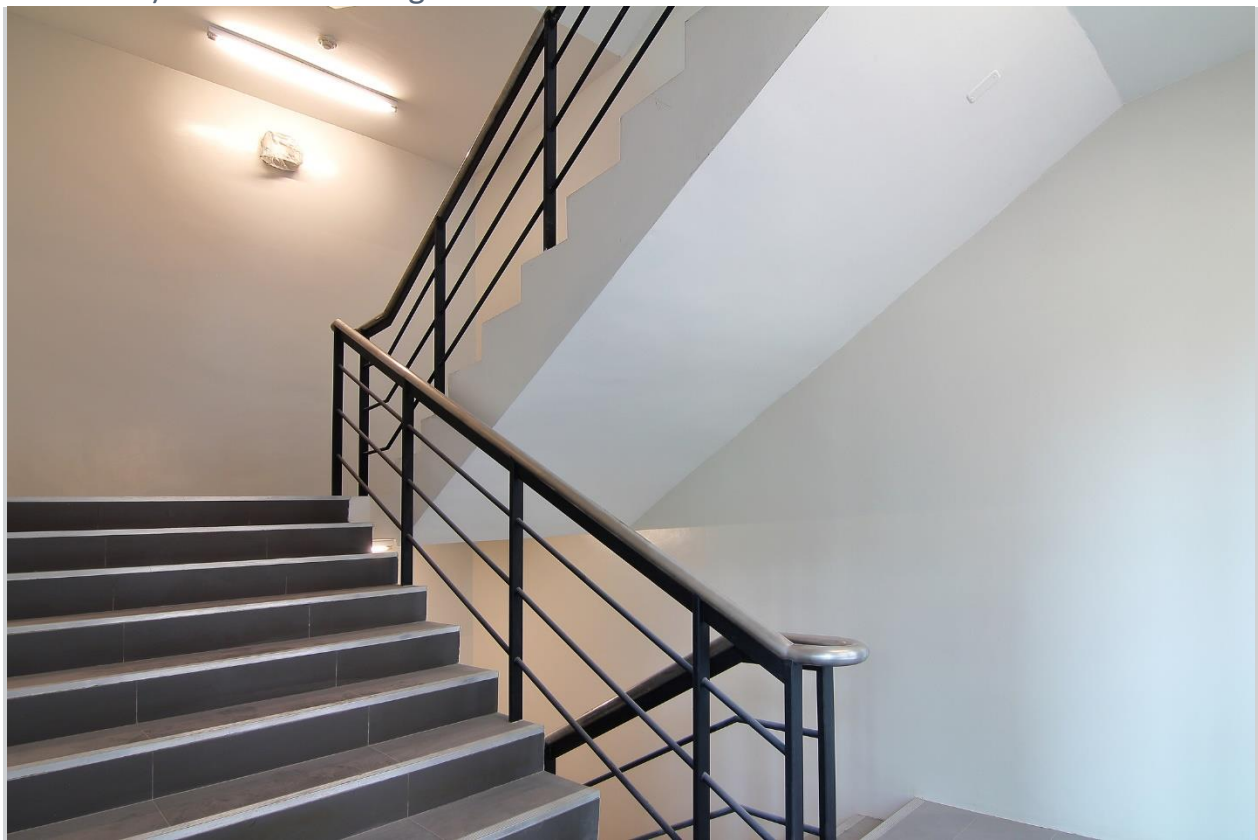
2. Ensure lighting sweeps – With the exception of safety lighting, whenever a building, floor or office is empty the lights should be off. If your building has lighting controls, make sure they are sweeping empty areas to ensure lighting is off. If you do not have lighting controls, ask any remaining staff to take responsibility for switching off lights. Write it into the standard operating procedure.

3. Update temperature setbacks – Knowing when your building is empty or partially full will allow for accurate adjustments to your equipment scheduling. If the few remaining office workers are arriving later, facility warming can start later. Or, if certain floors are empty, they can be maintained at the building's minimum temperature setback. Closely matching the building's operation with the presence of the occupants is paramount in maximizing energy savings.

4. Adjust stairwell lighting – Often underutilized, stairwells are prime areas for occupancy controls, or lighting sweeps. If lighting controls are not present for these areas, a possibility could be to delamp some bulbs (while ensuring adherence to emergency lighting requirements). For example: for two-lamp fixtures, remove one bulb; four-lamp fixtures, remove two bulbs.

5. Eliminate plug-loads – Look to unplug all major pieces of equipment or turn on energy saving modes where available. Tenants may have left equipment running that could easily be turned off, such as printers, kitchen appliances not being used, under-desk power bars, and computer monitors. Get tenant permission and unplug wherever you can.

6. Change fresh air intake settings – With empty buildings, the demand for fresh air will be reduced. Account for this change (while following ventilation safety standards) to avoid warming excess fresh air.



As social distancing requirements ease there will be a period where some activity restarts while still observing some level of distancing. There are many retrofit and maintenance activities that can be undertaken to reduce energy costs, maintain a certain level of activity for trades and maintenance staff, and adhere to social distancing guidelines.

7. Lighting retrofits – Empty offices can present a chance to do a relamping or delamping project during weekday hours. Relamp with LED bulbs, or for over-illuminated areas, start delamping, removing the whole fixture if possible*. Don't forget, if the bulb is removed but the ballast remains, there will still be a draw on that fixture, so ensure a qualified electrician removes the ballast (something that may need to wait unless social distancing measures can be carefully followed). **Please ensure adherence to electrical safety standards and requirements.*

8. Equipment maintenance – One of the most useful tools in any energy efficiency toolkit is maintenance. Maintaining equipment to its ideal parameters allows for a better, more efficient operating environment and longer equipment life. Now could be the chance to tackle jobs like cleaning the heat exchanger on the boiler, replacing air filters on rooftop units, treating the condenser water in the chiller, and so on.